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Correspondence

Re-Discovery of a Passage by Robert Ross on *Salome*

Joost Daalder writes:

Readers of the *BSANZ Bulletin* will remember my article 'A History of Confusion: The Two Earliest English Translations of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*' (vol.26, no.3 & 4, 2002, pp.131-72).

In this I showed that Douglas's translation of *Salome* (1894) 'has been persistently confused with a later, drastically overhauled version – virtually a new translation – first published in 1906 and almost certainly prepared by Robert Ross, Wilde's life-long friend, and his literary executor after his death in 1900' (p.132).

I am delighted to report that Ms Angela Kingston has recently re-discovered a much neglected passage which demonstrates that Robert Ross saw his drastically overhauled version (first published in 1906, and subsequently revised) as a 'new translation'. The passage was written by Ross as one of several remarks on Frank Harris's *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions*, probably soon after Harris finished his draft of that book in 1910. I quote Ross's comment from the 1918 edition of Harris's biography (New York: Published by the Author), p.608:

Do you [Harris] happen to have compared Douglas' translation of *Salome* in Lane's First edition (with Beardsley's illustrations) with Lane's Second edition (with Beardsley's illustrations) or Lane's little editions (without Beardsley's illustrations)? Or have you ever compared the aforesaid First edition with the original? Douglas' translation omits a great deal of the text and is actually wrong as a rendering of the text in many cases. I have had this out with a good many people. I believe Douglas is to this day sublimely unconscious that his text, of which there were never more than 500 copies issued in England, has been entirely scrapped; his name at my instance was removed from the current issues for the very good reason that the new translation is not his. But this is merely an observation not a correction.

Clearly this passage is of the greatest relevance to the statements I made in my article. It confirms much of what I wrote, yet takes matters further as well. A detailed analysis of this passage with its implications will be published in due course, as part of a paper which will also establish that the most authoritative translation of *Salome* is in fact a later, yet more improved version which Ross published in 1912 (see Stuart Mason, *A Bibliography of Oscar Wilde*, 1914, No 527).

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